

## **Using Social Networks and Mobile Technologies to Enlarge the Classroom Space**

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### ***Overview: The World is Our Classroom***

When information is stored on ubiquitous computer networks and available 24/7 from those networks, the distinction between storage and transmission becomes blurred. Other distinctions also break down, such as that between classroom space and world space. When students and teachers share knowledge with people outside their classroom, the world becomes the classroom. With this enlarged classroom come opportunities for learning from untraditional sources, from partners around the world, for instance. This enlarged classroom also brings challenges for understanding and communicating with people from other backgrounds and cultures.

This paper addresses a collaboration between an Information Design class at the University of Minnesota (UMN) and First Step Initiative (FSI), a non-profit, microfinance organization working with woman entrepreneurs in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). From this ongoing collaboration, partners are making situated knowledge and exploring opportunities for knowledge making, storage, and transmission across cultures afforded by social networking tools and mobile technologies.

For the collaborators in the US and the DRC, even good intentions cannot overcome differing expectations for how people use technologies to facilitate communication. In the course of this collaboration, it has become clear that differing expectations for communication channels to support FSI have resulted in sub-optimal participation in the organization from potential collaborators both in the US and the DRC. This study explores whether social networking tools (such as Facebook) and cell phones can be used to establish new channels for communication that meet interpersonal expectations for participants and potential participants in both the US and the DRC.

The case study presented here is taking place in conjunction with a faculty fellowship that the presenter was awarded from the UMN Digital Media Center. This fellowship supports an ongoing collaboration in which the presenter is engaged with Chingwell Mutombu, FSI founder. The presenter and Ms. Mutombu initially worked on a communication audit, which revealed differing expectations between the collaborators in the US and the DRC for using computer technologies to access web-based information in support of FSI operations.

In spring 2009, Ms. Mutombu and the presenter's graduate students have been exploring whether social networking tools and cell phones can be used to establish new channels for communication that meet interpersonal expectations for participants and potential participants in both the US and the DRC. It is anticipated that these strengthened social networks will help to establish stable and robust communication channels between network participants to facilitate fuller participation in FSI programs, thus enlarging the classroom learning space to include the world. In order to progress toward this goal, however, the collaborators in Minnesota and Katanga province must first build a common ground of understanding and communication, which they are doing this semester.

**Background: First Step Initiative in the Democratic Republic of Congo**

First Step Initiative (FSI) is a non-profit microfinance organization with the purpose of enabling women entrepreneurs in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to start small businesses. (See [www.firststepinitiative.org](http://www.firststepinitiative.org).) FSI was established in 2006 by Chingwell Mutombu, whose family is from the DRC but who has lived since her high-school years in the US. Ms. Mutombu now lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota where she is the founder and Executive Director of First Step Initiative. Throughout her professional career, she has worked on issues affecting disenfranchised communities both nationally and internationally. Ms. Mutombu's diverse background includes the founding of a consulting business which she currently runs, and her work as an advocate for human rights. She offers expertise in nonprofit management, program evaluation, microfinance, and grant management. She is a former chair of the Multicultural Endowment Fund at the Saint Paul Foundation and a former Philanthropy Fellow at the Women's Foundation of Minnesota. Ms. Mutombu is a graduate of Luther College and holds two Master's degrees from Seton Hall University in Public Administration (with a focus on nonprofit management) and International Relations.

Ms. Mutombu explains how she started FSI in this way: "Growing up in the Congo, I saw a lot of hopeful entrepreneurs trying to make ends meet; however, there were no infrastructures to support their income generating activities. When I came to the United States I came with a passion to make a difference in the lives of people back home. For many years I searched for ways to help the struggling communities in the Congo and



*One of First Step Initiative's entrepreneurs in the Democratic Republic of Congo.*

realized that all I needed to do to make a difference was to help one individual at a time. I realized that for every journey that one takes, it begins with one step. I began sending money to the DRC whenever I could, about \$50 at a time. With my mother's help, a lending circle of 10 women was eventually formed, and as the women established their businesses, they moved out of the circle and were replaced by new women. The success of the pilot project exceeded my expectations. The results inspired me to capitalize on our success and expand our services to reach more people. About a year and half ago (summer of 2006), I decided to formalize the organization and we are now incorporated as a 501(c)3 in the State of Minnesota" (FSI website).

The mission of FSI is to "empower the poorest of people to lift themselves out of poverty, create their own destinies, and achieve their full potential by providing access to capital, training, and information" (FSI website).

First Step Initiative works to reach the poorest individuals in the southern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Katanga province, where little opportunity exists for hopeful entrepreneurs. Katanga, a region of approximately 4.1-million people, has an unemployment rate as high as 90 percent. Typically women have a higher unemployment rate than men, yet are most often the primary or sole family caretakers.

Helping women in Katanga to gain additional daily income improves the condition of their entire household and community.

First Step Initiative provides small collateral free loans ranging in size from US\$50 to US\$150 that allow entrepreneurs in the DRC to finance their income-generating activities. These loans provide capital needed to grow fruit, raise livestock, purchase fabric, operate salons, open stores, and travel to markets where goods can be sold. Although these loans may seem small, to the recipient they offer extraordinary value by generating income for food, housing, health care, and education for entire families.

### ***Collaboration between University of Minnesota and First Step Initiative***

This case study is the continuation of a collaboration between Chingwell and myself that took place during my Information Design class in spring semester 2008. This class is one of the required courses for the MS in Scientific and Technical Communication degree at the University of Minnesota. It is offered once each year and I have been teaching this class for the last four years. I currently structure this course as a hybrid, with five face-to-face (f2f) meetings in a computer classroom and ten weeks when students work online. We meet f2f for the first two weeks of the semester, then once each month after that. We collaborate with a community client and for the past two years First Step Initiative has worked with us to provide authentic learning situations for the students' activities. During the f2f meetings, we get to know each other, discuss issues that pertain to the whole class, have guests to address issues pertaining to the class project and leave time for work groups to discuss project issues together. Chingwell participates with us either in person or via phone for the last three f2f meetings. During our online weeks, we have readings and small group discussion postings in a WebVista environment. We also share a wealth of resources pertaining to our client project via that site.

During the spring 2008 class, the graduate students, Chingwell and I conducted a communication audit to analyze FSI's communication tools and channels. After the audit, the class focused on the organization's website ([www.firststepinitiative.org](http://www.firststepinitiative.org)) and recommended changes to the website. After the class ended, three of the students continued working with Chingwell on various aspects of FSI communications. One outcome of that continued collaboration was a redesigned website, with design work and hosting donated by a firm recommended by one of the spring semester students.

Although we originally thought of the website as FSI's main communication tool, we found through our audit that the website was useful only for current and potential donors in the US. People in the US had ready access to the computers and Internet infrastructure that enabled access to the website in its current form. Information on the website was geared toward potential donors to persuade them to become involved with FSI through monetary contributions.

Support staff in the DRC could access the website, but it did not contain information or tools that would be useful for them. Current and potential entrepreneurs in the DRC would be unlikely to have access to the website in its current format and the information on the site would not be useful for them. These groups of people would have access to cell phone technologies, but would not be likely to have ready access to computers and the Internet infrastructures that supported the current FSI website format.

### **Getting Beyond the Website**

After working with Chingwell and my students in spring 2008, I began to think about how FSI could add mobile technologies to its current communication mix to widen its social network and accomplish its goals for connecting people in the US and the DRC. I asked Chingwell to tell me more about her vision for FSI and here's what she said:

"I'm not in this for personal gain, but because of my passion for people in the Congo. When I look into the eyes of a child in the Congo, I can see the question 'Why me?' I see the future of the Congo when I look into these eyes and I want to help take care of these children. The best way to do that is to intervene with mothers to help them build businesses to sustain themselves and their families.

"I can take this organization to a certain point myself, then it will need someone else to take it further with other skills and vision. I'm building this organization to sustain itself without me, like a kite. We need to bring other people into the organization to lead it into the future."

### **Project Ideas: Deploy Social Networking Tools and Mobile Technologies**

This project can be considered in three clusters:

- DRC needs
- US needs
- FSI needs

Although breaking up the network into these discrete pieces is an artificial separation, it is a useful rubric for thinking about how to address the communication problem described above.

DRC needs rest on the fact that groups we want to work with there have cell phones and do not have ready access to computer-based Internet connections. Chingwell and I have begun to explore how we can help to build a social network with people in the DRC based on current and emerging cell phone data capabilities. We would like to reformat the current website for mobile display. We would especially like to explore the possibility of video streaming to connect people in the DRC with the world outside the DRC. This would be an effective teaching tool for such topics as dealing with loan officers and other institutional situations that DRC entrepreneurs may be encountering for the first time. It would also help people outside the DRC to learn more about the FSI entrepreneurs' experiences and cooperative business models.

US needs include generating funds and expertise support to accomplish FSI's goals. The website currently addresses the funding need, but does not ask potential supporters to donate their expertise. It also does not allow people connected with FSI to network among



*First Step Initiative provides small collateral-free loans for women entrepreneurs to start businesses in Katanga Province.*

themselves or with people in the DRC. We would like to build a Web 2.0 social networking capability into the current website and also format this network for mobile technologies.

FSI needs focus on building a communication infrastructure to recruit leadership and grow the organization. We would like to nurture social relationships with people who are active with FSI to build a stable base of leadership to take the organization into the future. It might be possible to build a flexible, dynamic technological infrastructure for this organization that is based on Web 2.0 social networking concepts and thus supports a fluid, dynamic leadership structure. Chingwell and I do not currently know what this structure would look like, but we would like to explore how social networking concepts and capabilities could be used to rethink the leadership structure of a non-profit organization.

In spring 2009, Chingwell and I are again working with my graduate students in the Information Design class to explore whether social networking tools and cell phones can be used to establish new channels for communication that meet interpersonal expectations for participants and potential participants in both the US and the DRC. As Chingwell and I planned our collaboration with this year's class, we discussed a number of ideas that would be of a feasible scope to tackle in 15 weeks and chose two. Based on Chingwell's experiences with the FSI staff and entrepreneurs, we chose to focus on the problem of connecting urban and rural entrepreneurs via cell phones. Based on interests and expertise of a number of students enrolled in the class, we chose a second focus on developing a microphilanthropy campaign using a Facebook group and/or other social networking tools to encourage donations to FSI.

The project for connecting urban and rural entrepreneurs arises from needs communicated by the FSI staff and entrepreneurs in DRC. All too often, a businesswoman in the urban area of Lubumbashi, for example, might want to find tomatoes to sell. Right now, she arranges for transportation to a rural area and takes the chance that she will find someone who has grown tomatoes that are ready to harvest. If she doesn't find those tomatoes, she goes back to Lubumbashi empty-handed, having wasted her time and resources. Conversely, someone in a rural area who has harvested tomatoes might pack them up and transport them to Lubumbashi, which is most often a difficult trip by bicycle. If the grower does not find someone to buy the tomatoes, the food will spoil and again the trip will result in wasted time and resources. Being able to communicate between urban sellers and rural growers would improve the chances of these efforts being successful and profitable.



*FSI entrepreneur  
Beatrice (left)*

The project to develop a microphilanthropy campaign explores how people can use a social networking site such as Facebook or Twitter and their cell phones to carry out campaigns to raise a large number of small donations and share expertise in support of FSI's work. (See [On-Demand Volunteerism by Mobile Phone](#) for an example of this idea.)

### **Data Collection in Spring 2009**

Some of the data collected thus far for this project include 1) interviews with FSI staff, and FSI entrepreneurs and 2) questionnaires with students at the University of Minnesota. We will continue gathering data on this project during spring semester as students turn in their recommendations to Chingwell concerning the two project areas and we get further feedback on these recommendations from Chingwell and the FSI staff in DRC.

The interviews with FSI staff and entrepreneurs took place on Thursday, March 5, 2009 at 8:00 a.m. in Minneapolis and 4:00 p.m. in Lubumbashi via a three-way Skype call. In Lubumbashi, we had one FSI loan officer (Remy) and two women entrepreneurs (Beatrice and Mama Musi); Chingwell called in from one site in Minneapolis; in my University office we had myself and Marc Hannum, a graduate student involved with this project for the last year who recorded our conversation and later produced a podcast of the recording.

Five questions were asked during each of the three interviews:

1. What does your lending circle mean to you? How would you describe your lending circle to someone who didn't know about First Step Initiative?
2. How do you stay in touch with the people in your lending circle? Do you talk with them every day? Do you use your cell phone to stay in touch?
3. Please tell me how you currently use your cell phone.
4. How would you like to use your cell phone?
5. Please describe how you connect to people in rural areas now and how you would like to improve those connections.



*FSI Loan Officer Remy (left)*

During this 90-minute call, Chingwell interpreted questions to and responses from the FSI participants, who understood some English but preferred to respond in Swahili and French. The audio recording of the March 5, 2009 telephone interview with the FSI entrepreneurs and loan officer is available for download through this link ([FSI Podcast 1.mp3](#)) or this URL: <http://www.mediafire.com/?sharekey=9177f3074663af9f0dec85adfe0a530ae04e75f6e8ebb871> My notes from this telephone interview are attached as Appendix B.

On Monday, April 6, 2009, questionnaires were distributed via email to the 12 students in the Spring 2009 Information Design class and all 12 were returned with responses. The questionnaire is attached as Appendix A.

After some give-and-take, Chingwell and I developed two different sets of questions for the FSI interview group and the students. In order to connect to the FSI group's experiences, we asked questions that focused on their FSI "lending circles" rather than their "social circles," since this latter term would not have meaning for them. As Chingwell explained it to me, for the Congolese people, their lives are so intimately connected to their web of social connections that to separate these connections from the rest of their lives is not something that makes any sense to them.

### ***Breaking Down the Classroom Walls***

During the spring 2009 semester, the use of various communication technologies in our work with First Step Initiative in the Information Design class has connected our class to other people outside the university in ways that make the course material and the students' work more relevant. This use of a wide array of communication technologies also provides opportunities to think about how we can extend the ways we use these technologies – issues that are increasingly important as our tools proliferate. Above this instrumental learning, the opportunity to connect to people who live in very different cultures provides a human side of learning about technologies that is often difficult to work into traditional classroom learning.

So far this semester, students have done some traditional learning in the early weeks of the term, when I assigned readings on information design issues and concepts so they could learn some fundamentals in this field before venturing out to see how we can apply this knowledge. I am fortunate this semester to have students who are professionals in usability and web design, work in marketing, own businesses, and are knowledgeable about audio and video production, as well as mobile technologies. So this group learned the fundamentals quickly and was asking probing questions about issues around social networking and mobile technologies by the fifth week in preparation for our work with First Step Initiative. In the sixth week's f2f meeting, we started shifting our focus to the application of the ideas we had been covering earlier. Chingwell joined us for this meeting to introduce First Step Initiative. We were also joined by the chief technology officer from the UMN Office of Information Technology to discuss information design for mobile devices. Everyone posted their notes from that class discussion on the WebVista course site so we could share our impressions and information.

Right after we met f2f in the sixth week, one of the graduate students (Marc) and I arranged for the Skype call with the FSI group in DRC and Chingwell. We recorded the call and Marc produced it into a podcast, which he then uploaded to our course iTunesU site to share with everyone else. While the production was taking place, I posted my written notes to the course site so everyone could get some information right away.

When we next met f2f, we contacted Chingwell by Skype during class so students could ask questions about the problem statements they had just completed and which she had reviewed before the call. We also recorded this hour-long session and Marc had it posted to iTunesU before we left class.

Although we have many other opportunities for connecting via social networking and mobile technologies and many new avenues to explore, even these relatively simple tools and teaching strategies help to create a learning environment that transcends the university walls and opens the classroom to the world.

### **Reactions from the Students**

Responses from questions 1 and 2 from the 12 Information Design students' questionnaires are summarized in Appendix C. For the purposes of this study, I omitted questions 3 through 6 from this presentation and analysis, since they asked more about the students' social circle outside class and their use of their cell phones.

In response to question 1 (What do your connections with people in WRIT 5112 mean to you?), students mentioned the online small group discussions most frequently. One of these students commented that these discussions seemed forced, but others felt that they reflected common interests. Students mentioned their connections, but overall the response indicated that students did not feel very connected to the class group as a whole, but did feel somewhat connected to their small discussion groups. Students felt favorable about sharing ideas and felt this was a beneficial aspect of the class. They favorably mentioned the general discussions and face-to-face meetings as being beneficial, but expressed some desire for more f2f contact. There was some mention of being connected to classmates via LinkedIn and expecting to stay in touch after the class ended.

**Question 1. What do your connections with people in WRIT 5112 mean to you? How would you describe your connections with the people in this class to someone who didn't know about it? (N=12)**

<b>Category of response</b>	<b>Responses</b>
Small group discussions	7
Connection to classmates	6
Sharing ideas	5
General discussion	3
Face-to-face meetings	3
Social networking	2
Staying in touch with classmates	2

**Question 2. What do your connections with people in First Step Initiative mean to you? How would you describe your connections with the people in First Step Initiative to someone who didn't know about it? (N=12)**

<b>Category of response</b>	<b>Responses</b>
Connection to FSI as an organization	10
Connection to Chingwell	9
Connection to FSI in DRC	5
FSI materials	3

In response to question 2 (What do your connections with people in First Step Initiative mean to you?), students most frequently mentioned their connection to FSI as an organization, but had mixed reactions to this connection. Some felt personally connected to the group, others felt a professional connection (consultant-client), and others did not feel personally connected to the organization. Students frequently mentioned feeling personally connected to Chingwell as the representative of FSI as an organization. So although they may not all feel connected to FSI, they do feel connected to Chingwell



because they know her through personal interactions. Students were mixed in their feelings of being connected to the FSI people in the DRC, with some feeling connected and others not feeling connected. Some students felt that their connection with FSI was happening through the organization's website and Facebook group.

### ***Some Final Thoughts***

Intercultural communication is always difficult, even in the most well intentioned situations. Making connections across a cultural and technological divide challenges both me and my students to learn about human relations as much as about information design. I do not think that this kind of authentic intercultural learning can take place in traditional learning environments. But it can be facilitated by networked



*Small amounts of credit can lead to large changes in a family and community.*

communication technologies that we have only begun to understand as pedagogical tools. Even in this early phase of pedagogical development, though, we can overcome the timeless divide between the academy and the “townies” to create learning situations that reflect the relevance and impact of the work we do in universities on the world beyond our walls.

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## Appendix A: Information Design Student Questionnaire

1. What do your connections with people in WRIT 5112 mean to you? How would you describe your connections with the people in this class to someone who didn't know about it?

2. What do your connections with people in First Step Initiative mean to you? How would you describe your connections with the people in First Step Initiative to someone who didn't know about this organization?

3. What part of your social interactions is most important for you in your closest social circle? You can choose to describe what you value most about your life and relationships with the people who are close to you, such as your business circle, family, friends, or other social group.

4. How do you currently stay in touch with the people in your closest social circle, such as your business circle, family, friends, or other social group? How do you communicate with the people in your closest social circle?

5. Please let us know how you currently use your cell phone.  
Check all the ways you currently use your cell phone from the list below.

Also indicate the three ways you most often use your cell phone.

- Put 1 by the one you use most often
- Put 2 by the one you use second most often
- Put 3 by the one you use third most often

<input type="checkbox"/> talking with people in my social group	<input type="checkbox"/> connecting to the World Wide Web (Internet)
<input type="checkbox"/> talking with people to do business	<input type="checkbox"/> listening to music or other audio programs
<input type="checkbox"/> sending short text messages (SMS)	<input type="checkbox"/> viewing video or other visual programs
<input type="checkbox"/> sending multimedia messages (MMS)	<input type="checkbox"/> playing games
<input type="checkbox"/> taking photographs	<input type="checkbox"/> connecting to Facebook
<input type="checkbox"/> recording video	<input type="checkbox"/> connecting to Twitter

6. Please let us know two ways you would like to use your cell phone to do things you do not currently do with your cell phone.

- Put 1 by the one you would like to use the most
- Put 2 by the one you would like to use second most

<input type="checkbox"/> talking with people in my social group	<input type="checkbox"/> connecting to the World Wide Web (Internet)
<input type="checkbox"/> talking with people to do business	<input type="checkbox"/> listening to music or other audio programs
<input type="checkbox"/> sending short text messages (SMS)	<input type="checkbox"/> viewing video or other visual programs
<input type="checkbox"/> sending multimedia messages (MMS)	<input type="checkbox"/> playing games
<input type="checkbox"/> taking photographs	<input type="checkbox"/> connecting to Facebook
<input type="checkbox"/> recording video	<input type="checkbox"/> connecting to Twitter
<input type="checkbox"/> other (please explain)	

## Appendix B : Notes from Telephone Interview

March 5, 2009 8:00 – 9:30 a.m. CST

### **People participating on call:**

Chingwell Mutombu, Remy (FSI program officer), Beatrice (FSI entrepreneur), Mama Musi (FSI entrepreneur), Marc Hannum, Bernadette Longo



### **Beatrice's responses (on left in photo)**

1. Our lending circles bring people together to exchange ideas – ideas about how we can fight poverty. People helping people in the DRC.
2. We meet once each week on Tuesdays to trouble shoot about our problems as a group. We use cell phones once in a while, but we mostly meet face to face. If we have lots of problems, we will contact by phone. But it's expensive to buy the minutes, so we mostly talk face to face.
3. We use cell phones to contact our families and each other. We mostly use when it's an emergency, but not for routine things. We watch how many minutes we use and usually take 5 minutes to talk when we get in touch by phone.
4. I would really love if it was easier to communicate directly so we would not have to travel so far. We could make arrangements ahead of time and stay in touch better. It would be absolutely fine to be able to send text messages, connect to the internet, take photos and videos. Our phones don't have those capabilities.
5. We connect to people in rural areas mainly by traveling there, but we aren't connected so that we can communicate ahead. So we travel without knowing ahead and we pay a lot to do this. We're not well connected.

### **Mama Musi's responses**

1. The lending circle is a place where women come together and join hands to fight poverty.
2. We have f2f meetings once each week and stay in touch mostly that ways. We'd like to communicate more with phones, but it's a challenge to get the minutes because they are expensive – about US\$2.00 for 50 minutes. If I had the minutes, I'd like to keep in touch every day.
3. Right now, it has to be a pressing issue for us to get in touch by phone. We use them when we really need to.
4. If I had a telephone that would do more work, I would like to take video pictures to show people what we're doing here. I would like to share our work with microfinance with other people and show them what their investment [in First Step Initiative] is doing here. I want people to know how grateful we are and to thank the people who are helping us. I'd also like to use video to connect to people in the rural areas.
5. Better communication would make it easier for us to connect with people in the rural areas for commerce. It would also help us to stay in touch with people in our groups in the rural areas, especially in case they might get ill and need health care. That way we could be sure that they get transportation to health care when they need that.



**Remy's responses (on left in photo)**

1. These circles are a marvel for the people who are a part of them. They work in the groups to fight poverty through microfinance, which is a new idea in DRC. These groups help to give the women courage because they know someone else is willing to help them and to help push them forward.
2. I work with 4 different circles and they each meet on a weekly basis. They stay in touch mostly face to face. As the groups grow and get further into the outskirts of Lubumbashi, it would be nice to be able to communicate more by phone. This would make it easier to stay in touch, because it's difficult to be in contact only once a week.
3. Right now I have a cell phone but rarely use it because it's a challenge to get the minutes.
4. I would like to use the cell phone for messages, video, photos, any option I could use. If I had an iPhone, this would be so powerful. I would need time to understand everything about it, but then I could teach others how to use them. These would be powerful phones in DRC, but they are expensive. It would be great to connect to MSN [hotmail, news, etc.]. Right now we are using Nokia phones.
5. I would like to have seamless transportation with the rural areas where people there could bring stuff into the urban areas. This would help merchandise move with lower expense. Telephones would improve the communication and make this situation better. I would like to work with our microfinance groups to spend time and understand more about how we could use cell phones so we can include funds to buy minutes in their budgets to use for business purposes. Right now the minutes are holding them back, but they are much needed. I'm speaking as a loan officer now.

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**Appendix C: 5112 Students interview questions (April 7, 2009)  
12 Respondents**

**Questions 3 through 6 were omitted from this appendix and analysis.**

**1. What do your connections with people in WRIT 5112 mean to you? How would you describe your connections with the people in this class to someone who didn't know about it?**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Small group discussions</b>	<b>7</b>	
		R1: The online small group discussions are fairly compulsory and mostly forced.
		R2: I am starting to feel like I'm making some good connections with my small group from our online discussions... I feel comfortable admitting when I don't know something
		R3: I have a little better understanding of those in my small group.
		R5: But we have a common interest in information design. This results in good discussions, both in person and online, and I benefit from the different perspectives and feedback that everyone provides.
		R7: Our internet interaction is regular and 2 way.
		R9: Connections to classmates in WRIT 5112 are meaningful because the weekly critical analysis and the in-person perspectives help make the material more multi-faceted and understandable.
		R12: The online component of the class, I think, allows for more openness and expansiveness in discussions.
<b>Connection to classmates</b>	<b>6</b>	
		R2: We have met F2F three times I believe and although I recognize faces of the other classmates, I don't necessarily remember names or their academic or professional affiliations. In my opinion there is a divergence there as the semester progresses, which is unusual as compared to traditional classes where you feel more connected. I do feel connected to Prof. Longo because we have her frequent whole group communications, small group comments on postings and individual grading comments.
		R3: I don't feel very connected to the people in the class.
		R4: The connections with people in WRIT 5112 mean that I am part of a community. To me, it means I am part of a group, a team.
		R6: I would describe my connections with classmates just as that – as an academic, professional relationship.
		R10: The people in 5112 are my colleagues.
		R12: I do feel, however, that we don't get to know each other as well and don't form as lasting of connections as we would if it were all face
<b>Sharing ideas</b>	<b>5</b>	
		R2: We often go above and beyond the posting requirement because I think we sincerely respect and are curious about each other's ideas.
		R5: I enjoy connecting with the people in WRIT 5112 to learn about their ideas, get their interpretations of our readings, and work with them on the FSI projects.
		R7: I would say that we have common interests from multiple valuable perspectives that we are able to apply to academic topics.
		R8: My connections to the people in WRIT 5112 have enriched my understanding of some of the technical complexities of communicating with new/mobile technologies.
		R10: We share resources (knowledge, expertise, criticism, etc.), we work together toward a common goal, and we keep each other enthusiastic and innovative.

<b>General discussion</b>	<b>3</b>	
R5: But we have a common interest in information design. This results in good discussions, both in person and online, and I benefit from the different perspectives and feedback that everyone provides.		
R6: in graduate school, my classroom relationships are confined to the classroom, official school (online) networks (WebCT), and professional online networks (e.g. LinkedIn).		
R8: I would highlight the spirited discussions and innovative ideas each person brings.		
<b>Face-to-face meetings</b>	<b>3</b>	.
R1: The connections with those in the entire class are a bit more significant, but not as significant if the class met more than 1 time per month.		
R5: But we have a common interest in information design. This results in good discussions, both in person and online, and I benefit from the different perspectives and feedback that everyone provides.		
R12: I like the face-to-face component too because it personalizes the connections		
<b>Social networking</b>	<b>2</b>	
R2: I feel like I'm just starting to get to know them and am linked to one on LinkedIn,		
R6: in graduate school, my classroom relationships are confined to the classroom, official school (online) networks (WebCT), and professional online networks (e.g. LinkedIn).		
<b>Staying in touch with classmates</b>	<b>2</b>	
R2: am linked to one on LinkedIn, suggesting that we might stay in touch after the class is over		
R11: I feel that my classmates are also acquaintances that I could contact for non-class related subjects. Since many of us work at the U, the class is also a good networking tool for us.		

**2. What do your connections with people in First Step Initiative mean to you? How would you describe your connections with the people in First Step Initiative to someone who didn't know about this organization?**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Connection to FSI as an organization</b>	<b>10</b>	
R1: Without Chingwell, I wouldn't be able to understand anything about FSI or work on any information design projects for it.		
R2: I do feel more connected to the mission of FSI, but not the individuals at this stage.		
R3: I do not feel I have any special connection with FSI.		
R4: The connections with people in First Step Initiative mean that I am part of a good-will effort and important cause.		
R6: I would describe my relationship with people in the FSI similarly to my relationship with my current classmates – academic and professional.		
R8: I view the FSI connection as a blend of a client relationship with altruistic qualities.		
R9: I think about FSI and try to support it, but am not personally connected much or that important to anyone in FSI.		
R10: The people in FSI are my mentors, my friends, and my role models. I learn something new from them every day, and am constantly amazed by their resourcefulness.		
R11: I feel like I am part of a brainstorming group working to make the program better. I have a vested interest in FSI because it's a requirement of the class, but my personal interest will likely keep me involved with the organization even after the course has ended.		
R12: I feel like we are making "human" connections with Chingwell/FSI. We're focused on improving some aspect of our world together...it's not just a give/take, teacher/student relationship.		

<b>Connection to Chingwell</b>	<b>9</b>	
R1: Chingwell is the only direct connection to FSI I've had.		
R2: I would say that I feel as though I am starting to feel more of a connection with FSI because we have had increasing exposure to Chingwell		
R3: Chingwell is very welcoming and seems to honestly try to make connections.		
R4: The only person from First Step Initiative that I've really had any interaction with is Chingwell.		
R5: My connections with people in First Step Initiative are mainly through Chingwell, the FSI website, and materials on the course website.		
R6: Currently, communications between me and FSI have been limited to one person within the organization (Chingwell), and have only occurred in an academic setting.		
R7: I would say Chingwell is an inspirational figurehead and a dynamic personality. The rest of the staff I only know from her descriptions.		
R8: My connection to people in the First Step Initiative is limited to Chingwell.		
R12: I feel like we are making "human" connections with Chingwell/FSI. We're focused on improving some aspect of our world together...it's not just a give/take, teacher/student relationship.		
<b>Connection to FSI in DRC</b>	<b>5</b>	
R1: [Chingwell] has connected us to the whole organization through her ability to describe the roles of all stakeholders and participants.		
R2: Although we were privy to some notes from a conference call with other FSI employees, I cannot say that I feel I have a connection with them personally or with their clients.		
R5: Even though I haven't met the women in DRC, I feel like I know them in a way. I want to help improve their extremely difficult situation.		
R7: I would say Chingwell is an inspirational figurehead and a dynamic personality. The rest of the staff I only know from her descriptions.		
R8: From a distance, I also feel a connection to the women/families helped through the program.		
<b>FSI materials</b>	<b>3</b>	
R5: My connections with people in First Step Initiative are mainly through Chingwell, the FSI website, and materials on the course website		
R6: While I have felt encouraged to join the FSI Facebook group, I make a concerted effort to keep my Facebook account limited only to my personal friends, and use LinkedIn for professional and academic relationships		
R9: The FSI Web site and being part of the organization's Facebook group is more meaningful because it's a relevant cause that helps learning about non-profits and aid generally--and it helps make the class material make sense somewhere		